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## THE SECOND BIRTH OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

In the summer of 1904 was celebrated with notable festivity the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the Republican party. Proceedings on this occasion were characterized by the unquestioning assumption that the political organization formed "under the oaks" at Jackson, Michigan, half a century before and there named the Republican party had maintained its identity under that name in unbroken continuity down to the present day. It was doubtless proper that for an occasion like that celebration such an assumption should be made and left unquestioned. Whether the same attitude is correct for the serious student of history, is more than doubtful. It is difficult to say by precisely what criterion the continuity of party life is to be judged. Should we look to principles, to personnel, to name, or to all three combined? Whichever test we choose in connection with the Republican party, we shall find troublesome if not insuperable obstacles in the way of tracing its life unbroken through half a century. We shall find that at one very critical period of our national history the party was, if not dead, at least in a state of suspended animation, and that so far as it was capable of expressing an opinion on its own condition, it admitted that it was dead.

In so summary a treatment of this subject as I am obliged to employ here, I can consider only the aspect of the matter which is concerned with the national organization. It may be assumed that the course of affairs in the state organizations manifests a general correspondence with that in the broader field.

When in 1860 the Republicans won their first great national victory the party was still heterogeneous and ill-compacted. The single characteristic principle upon which all elements were agreed was that of opposition to the further extension of slavery; outside of that the ancient antipathies, personal and political, of Free Soilers, Whigs, Democrats, and Know-Nothings caused much friction. At the outbreak of war, however, all former issues were for a time lost sight of in the overwhelming tide of Union sentiment. Party lines disappeared, but made themselves manifest again when after a year of fighting little impression had been made upon the South and the administration had begun to employ the war power in ways which played havoc with old ideals of constitutional liberty. In the

reappearance of active party politics the opposition to the administration worked under the name and with the organs of the Democratic party; but the supporters of the administration, following the lead of Mr. Lincoln himself, systematically avoided resort to the name and traditions of the Republican party. It was fully demonstrated by the state and Congressional elections of 1862 that without uniting the War Democrats to the Republicans the conquest of the South was practically out of the question. This indispensable combination could hardly be hoped for, in any effective form, save through the frank abandonment by the Republicans of their distinctive party character. Such policy, therefore, was followed in all parts of the North. The Republican local organizations were used, since the War Democrats had in general no distinctive organs; but in place of the Republican name, that of Union party was adopted; for the test of anti-slavery doctrine was substituted that of purpose to maintain the integrity of the Union at whatever cost; and in the nominations for office the distinction between Democratic and Republican antecedents was disregarded. The process which went on was not that of a temporary fusion of two parties, but that of the creation of a new party, with a purpose and a policy distinct from what had been characteristic of any party theretofore.

The climax of this movement came in the National Convention at Baltimore in 1864. This assembly was neither spoken nor thought of by its members as a Republican convention. The formal call which initiated it was issued by the Republican National Executive Committee, but in no other respect was any suggestion of connection with any old party permitted to be associated with its proceedings. Its temporary chairman declared, amid the applause which attends all the speeches on such occasions, that among the solemn duties that must be performed by the convention was that of organizing the Union party.

I see before me [he said] not only primitive Republicans and primitive Abolitionists, but I see also primitive Democrats and primitive Whigs . . . primitive Americans. . . . As a Union party I will follow you to the ends of the earth and to the gates of death; but as an Abolition Party, as a Republican Party, as a Whig Party, as a Democratic Party, as an American Party I will not follow you one foot.

And the permanent chairman said, in his carefully prepared address:

In no sense do we meet as members or representatives of either of the old political parties . . . or as champions of any principle or doctrine peculiar to either. The extraordinary condition of the country since the outbreak of the rebellion . . . has compelled the formation of

substantially new political organizations: hence the origin of the Union Party . . . of which this convention is, for the purpose of its assembling, the accredited representative, and the only test of membership in which is an unreserved, unconditional loyalty to the government and the Union.

These expressions would sufficiently demonstrate that the Republican party, as such, had no share in the convention; but to them may be added the explicit declaration of the platform that it embodies the views of "Union men", "laying aside all differences of political opinion", and the final and conclusive fact that the nominee for Vice-President, Andrew Johnson, had never professed anything but utter antipathy for any characteristic item of Republican belief save opposition to Secession.

Whatever view be required by the exigencies of anniversary celebrations, the conclusion from the facts and from contemporary opinion must be that the Republican party as a general political organization did not exist in 1864. Not that the name "Republican" disappeared from the vocabulary of party politics. In many cases it was still retained in the official title of local and state organizations, just as the name "Whig" had persisted as the designation of various *disjecta membra* of a party long after the national organization had ceased to exist. Moreover the Democrats never called their antagonists anything but Republicans, and for a double reason. In the first place the odium which the name carried to old-time Democrats would tend to deter them from going over to the party which bore it; and secondly, the appropriation of the term "Union men" by the administration party was hotly resented by the Democrats because of the implication it carried that none but administration men favored the maintenance of the Union. The Democratic contention was, of course, that the Democrats desired to maintain the Union by rational and constitutional means, while their adversaries insisted on bloodshed and despotism. While the Democrats, then, consistently stigmatized the members of the new party as Republicans, those men themselves, even when of ultra-Republican antecedents, consistently repudiated the name and called themselves Union men.

The Union party won a complete victory in the elections of 1864, and during the following winter and spring saw the triumph of the two cardinal features of its policy—the destruction of the Confederacy and the passage of a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery. On the question which now assumed the first importance—the manner and method of reconstruction—the party had formulated no opinion whatever. The sudden and complete realization of the

purpose which had dominated its organization left it now without discernible cause for further existence.<sup>1</sup> But it is no more the habit of political parties than of individuals to disappear from the earth merely because no reason can be assigned for their further continuance upon it. Two facts operated to preserve the identity of the Union party—the possession of national and state offices and the traditional hostility of the Democratic organization. As the administration's policy of restoring the rebel states progressed in its development, however, a well-defined line of cleavage appeared within the Union party in reference to that policy. The factions were known as Conservative and Radical, and the fundamental issue between them was whether the Union which they had labored successfully to save should be on practically the same basis as it had been before the war, or should be regarded as substantially transformed in consequence of the war. During the summer and autumn of 1865 the conservative idea, under the lead of the administration, was manifestly in the ascendant, and the Radicals were but a factious and impotent minority. So general, indeed, was the satisfaction with the President's conservative policy that even the Democrats fell into line behind him, and the same Andrew Johnson who figures in history as an abysmal presidential failure figures at the same time as the only President in his generation who received formal endorsement from both the great political parties of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

The first half of the year 1866 wrought a complete transformation in party conditions. Through Mr. Johnson's lack of tact and of sound political judgment the Union majority in Congress was hopelessly alienated from him. This inured greatly to the advantage of the Radicals throughout the country. That the Democrats clung firmly to him, had the same effect. The restoration of the Southern States, which Mr. Johnson claimed was practically complete in

<sup>1</sup> "Of the parties that existed when the war began the name 'Democratic' alone remains. The Constitutional Union party survives only in John Bell drinking success to the rebellion in bad whisky. The Republican party, as such, has secured its great object of limiting the extension of slavery. The necessities of the case, in a nation waging a civil war, divide us all into two bodies; those who support the Administration in its war policy, and those who do not. But the old party lines do not separate us. The party of the Administration is composed of men as different as the late Edward Everett, General Butler, John A. Griswold, Thurlow Weed, and Charles Sumner, who were respectively leaders of the Bell-Everett, the Breckinridge, the Douglas parties, and both wings of the Republican party, before the war. We are at the end of parties." *Harper's Weekly*, editorial, February 25, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> He was formally approved by the state conventions of both Union and Democratic parties in most of the states that held elections in 1865.

the winter of 1865-1866, raised questions of party conditions which also tended steadily to confirm the growth of Radicalism in the North. The rehabilitation of the rebel states, with an increased Congressional representation, would bring into national politics an element whose sympathy would be entirely with the Conservative Unionists if not with the Democratic party outright. For Radicalism in general, and especially for negro suffrage, which was the quintessence of the Radical creed, there was no hope in the policy of presidential reconstruction. Hence the Radical cry that Johnson's policy meant in fact a recombination of the Copperhead Democracy of the North with the Secession Democracy of the South to undo the work achieved by the Union armies. This cry proved exceedingly effective and turned Union men by thousands, especially those of Republican antecedents, from Conservative to Radical sympathy.

By the summer of 1866 it was clear that the machinery of the Union party was entirely in the hands of the Radicals, and the Conservatives made a final great effort to organize their cause and define their creed. Taking as their point of attack the obviously sectional character of the Radical programme, they called for an organization that should truly embody the Union idea by being really national in scope. In the famous National Union Convention at Philadelphia on August 14, 1866, an impressive demand was made for reconciliation of the sections and for a policy and a party that should command support in both South and North. This convention, participated in by men of the greatest reputation and influence from both Northern and Southern states, gave much uneasiness to the Radicals. To the claim that the assembly represented the true character of the Union party and made it national where it had before been purely sectional, they could reply and demonstrate that most of the delegates to the convention were former Democrats, and could affirm that the body was therefore merely an agency for reuniting the Democracy which had split in 1860. But they were troubled to show that Radicalism was anything but a purely sectional creed. To overcome this difficulty the cause of the Southern Loyalists was taken up with vehemence by the Radicals. Under Radical auspices a convention of Southerners was held at Philadelphia in September, and their wrongs, their sufferings, and their political aspirations received elaborate exploitation. But though they served a temporary purpose in giving a tinge of nationalism to the Radical programme, they proved much too scanty in numbers and too microscopic in influence to sustain for any time the pre-

tension of the Radicals to a party following in the South. It was this fact which was chiefly influential in bringing about the adoption of negro suffrage as the only remaining means of nationalizing the party. The reproach of sectionalism had been deeply felt by the ante-bellum Republicans; it would be a continuing burden on the Radicals; it could be removed by marshalling the freedmen in party array, and accordingly this policy was consented to by many to whom the injection of a great mass of ignorance and incapacity into the politics of the land was, as an abstract proposition, intensely hateful.

It was not till later, however, that this negro-suffrage phase of the Radical movement fully developed. For the electoral campaign of 1866 the extreme tendencies of Radicalism were kept in the background, in order not to repel lukewarm and wavering Conservatives. This campaign, in its progress and its result, made an epoch in party history. The Radicals won an overwhelming victory throughout the North, and this, since the Southern States were by the Radical policy excluded from participation in the government, meant a complete control of national affairs. The movement to nationalize the Union party on conservative lines, which had seemed to have such strength in August, was shown by November to have made no real impression on Northern sentiment. The participants in the movement fell gradually into affiliation with the Democrats or the Radicals, as circumstances or temperament dictated, and the conservative faction of the Union party ceased to exist.

With the completion of this process during 1867 and 1868 the new birth of Republicanism was at hand. With the great influx of Conservatives into the Radical wing of the Union party, the Radicalism was subjected to powerful toning influences. Though triumphant in the matter of negro enfranchisement, the extremists were thwarted in the impeachment of the President—the utmost project of their party policy. To the moderates the name of Radical was distasteful, as not corresponding to any fact in the existing situation of the party as a whole. "Unionist", the other half of the designation in which the Radicals had gloried, was, while not distasteful to the moderates, still no longer significant, since the practical restoration of the Union through the completion of reconstruction. The opposition to the party in power was now marshalled fully and completely under the banner of the ancient Democracy, and this fact greatly stimulated the consciousness of a relation to the old Republican party. Under the influence of these various circumstances the name "Republican" became increasingly

common in the place of both Unionist and Radical. This tendency reached its climax in the nominating convention of 1868, where, by direct vote of the convention itself, the official title of the organization was ordered to be: The National Union Republican Party.<sup>3</sup> In this title may be discerned the chief elements which had figured in the new birth of Republicanism. It sprang from the loins of the Union party which brought the war to an end, and it was made "national" by the adoption of negro suffrage in reconstruction. Only in 1872 did the term "Union" disappear from the official title; and it is even more significant that at the National Convention of this year appeared for the first time a point-with-pride plank in the platform claiming for the party an unbroken connection with the Republicanism of 1860. In fine oblivion of the whole "Union" episode the platform asserted that the "Republican" party had been supreme for eleven years and had suppressed the rebellion and emancipated the slaves. Accuracy is not the chief virtue of party platforms, and we need not dwell on the degree to which the quality is present in these assertions. The significant fact for our purpose is that the assertions were made; for in this fact is the conclusive evidence that the reborn party had become fully self-conscious and was seeking, as is the habit of all strongly self-conscious personalities, to verify its ancestry and to associate itself with the glories of an historic past. In the three succeeding national platforms this same theory of historical continuity from 1854 was proclaimed, and thus the tradition became fully established. Hence even at the present day it is widely believed that the presidential election of 1864 was a "Republican" victory; that Andrew Johnson was an apostate from the "Republican" party; that Edwin M. Stanton was a "Republican" martyr; and that the party of which Benjamin F. Butler, John A. Logan, and Ulysses S. Grant were chiefs in 1868<sup>4</sup> was identical with that in which William H. Seward, Salmon

<sup>3</sup> In the debate on the rules governing the order of business in the convention Governor Van Zandt, of Rhode Island, moved to change the words "National Union Party", used in the committee's report, to "National Republican Party". The chairman said that the call for the convention used the title "National Union Republican Party", and accordingly, on motion of General Logan, this title was adopted. *New York Times*, May 21, 1868.

<sup>4</sup> All five of the men mentioned were Democrats in 1860; and no one of them was ever thought of as a "Republican" before 1868. They were "Union" men. In the same category were Daniel E. Sickles, John A. Dix, and many other conspicuous politicians. On the other hand, five of the seven members of Lincoln's original cabinet, namely, Seward, Chase, Welles, Blair, and Bates, were in 1868 wholly out of sympathy with the party that nominated Grant, and one of the five, Chase, narrowly failed of securing the nomination of the Democracy in opposition to Grant. For Vice-President the Democrats nominated in 1868 General F. P. Blair, who was in 1860 a prominent Republican.

P. Chase, and Abraham Lincoln had a corresponding place in 1860. The considerations that have been presented in this paper may suggest some of the qualifications with which this view of history is to be accepted.

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